

Fire Information – Elbow Pass Complex

September 10, 2012 10:00 AM

Incident Team: Type 3 IMT Kyle Inabnit, Brett Witte (T)

Cause: Lightning

Acres: 21,983 acres

Resources: 1 helicopter

Containment 0%

Total Personnel: 18

Contact: Wendy Clark (406) 466-5341 ext. 132

Because fire activity has remained relatively stable and fire growth has remained slow, we will continue to provide updates only every 3-5 days. If conditions such as fire activity, fire growth, or trail or closure areas change significantly, we will provide updates more frequently as needed. **The next update is projected for Friday September 14 unless conditions change.** Inciweb will be updated to reflect changing fire conditions and current area and trail closures. Maps will be posted on Inciweb and at fire information boards for the Elbow Pass Fire Complex.

<http://www.inciweb.org/incident/3066/>

The fire has increased by roughly 900 acres since the last update, to a total of approximately 21,983 acres. Most of the recent growth has been on the southern and western perimeters, in the Rapid Creek and Green Fork areas with small areas of growth in the South Fork Sun River drainage. Fire behavior over the past several days has consisted largely of single tree torching, occasional group tree torching, and short uphill runs in some areas. The fire continues to be largely surrounded by natural barriers and burn scars, and has not been approaching previously identified areas of concern. The Elbow Pass Complex fires put up some visible smoke in the past few days, particularly on Saturday. Much of the smoke apparent along the Rocky Mountain Front in recent days, however, has moved in from fires farther west in Montana and in Idaho. Smoke from those fires shaded the Elbow Pass Complex on Sunday, diminishing predicted fire behavior.

The weather has entered a typical fall pattern of warm, dry days with some wind, punctuated by brief cold fronts bringing increased wind but little precipitation. There is a Red Flag warning through midnight today (Monday) for gusty winds and low relative humidity. Despite dry, windy, and warm conditions, fire behavior is expected to remain similar to that observed in recent days with minimal spread expected. The fire may spread uphill in some areas of the South Fork Sun River in surface fuels where heat remains, and some single and group tree torching may occur with limited spotting across the river from west to east. We anticipate some single and group tree torching in the Bar Creek and Rapid Creek areas with some downslope spread. The fire will continue to be active in the Green Fork area, but minimal spread is expected there.

A cool front is expected to move across the area late Monday, with both winds and temperatures decreasing on Tuesday. The front will bring a very slight chance of precipitation late Monday, but dry conditions will prevail over the next several days. Fire managers will continue aerial reconnaissance and fuels sampling to estimate fire behavior. One helicopter is currently assigned to the fire and is available for water drops to cool fire spread if needed, and to assist with initial attack. The helicopter may be reassigned if needs are greater on other area fires. All lookouts are fully staffed, providing fire behavior and weather observations and assisting with communications.

The Elbow Pass Complex is the result of five different lightning ignitions from July 12 through July 31. The fires are generally located 25 miles west southwest of Augusta, Montana. We expect the fire to continue to burn until there is significant season-ending rain or snow. The Fire Team will continue to monitor fire behavior and movement.

We appreciate the continued assistance of cooperating agencies, firefighting resources, and residents of Augusta and surrounding communities during this long fire season. Thank you for your support.

Recreation Opportunities: While the Benchmark Road is open, the area is closed beginning a half mile west of the road. Numerous trails remain closed. Please check with local offices for specific recreation information. Please note that vehicles parked at the trailhead could be at fire risk due to possible future fire activity. The Benchmark and Augusta air strips are both open.

The Lewis and Clark, Flathead, Helena, and Lolo National Forests are evaluating closures to determine whether any currently closed trails or areas can be re-opened. Public safety in the face of active fire, damaged trail surfaces, and abundant unstable snags all represent hazards that must be addressed prior to opening any trail or area to the public.

For more information on these or other wildland fires, and related information visit:

www.inciweb.org or call:

Augusta Information Station	406-562-3247	Choteau District Office	406-466-5341
Seeley Lake Ranger District	406-677-2233	Spotted Bear Ranger District	406-758-5376

TRAIL and AREA Closures for the Elbow Pass Complex

AREA CLOSURES on the Lewis and Clark National Forest, Flathead National Forest, and Lolo National Forest remain in effect. In addition, these trails remain closed:

Trail Closures for Elbow Pass Complex:

- **South Fork Sun River Trail # 202** : the portion of the trail south of the South Fork Sun River Pack Bridge
- **Straight Creek Trail #212**: the portion of the trail north of Straight Creek Pass)
- **Hoadley Creek trail #226**
- **Patrol Mountain Lookout Trail #213**
- **Ellis Creek Trail #227**
- **East Fork Ahorn Trail # 225** : the portion of the trail south of Grizzly Basin
- **Observation Pass Trail #246**
- **Elbow Pass Trail # 248**
- **Cigarette Rock Trail #247**
- **Green Fork Trail # 228**
- **Petty-Crown Trail #232**
- **Crown Mountain Trail #270**
- **Halfmoon Creek Trail #216**
- **Telephone Creek Trail #274**

Prisoner Fire area restriction (Flathead NF):

- **Indian Creek Trail (#211)** has been re-opened as of Saturday, Sept. 8. Trail #138 on the Flathead NF has also been opened, but users of that area should be aware that there is an area closure south of Trail #138 in the vicinity of the Prisoner Lake Fire.